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Silencing youth sexuality in Senegal: intersections of medicine and morality

Gender and Education (forthcoming)

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Abstract

This article reports on recent research funded by international development actors which explored how Senegalese youth acted as ‘active citizens’ and claimed their education and sexual and reproductive health rights. Our analysis is framed by a review of contemporary international development discourses that seem to offer fertile possibilities for more plural understandings of sexuality. After describing the research methodology and methods, we draw on post-structural theory to analyse the discourses youth deployed to talk about sex and their sexualities. Rather than a source of pleasure, youth’s talk of sex and sexuality was dominated by discourses of morality and medicine, in ways that sustained a heteronormative gender regime permeated by entrenched hegemonic masculinities. We conclude that rather than the fertile possibilities identified in our opening review, the sexual and reproductive health lens re-inscribed a negative framing of sexuality which was compounded by both family and religious norms. (146 words)

Introduction

Youth’s precarious position in many contexts of the Global South remains a widespread concern so that supporting youth in becoming active citizens is of considerable interest to international policy-makers (World Bank 2006; UN 1995; 2014; UNESCO 2015). A key aspect of youth citizenship is acknowledged to be their rights to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) (UN 2010; 2012). Interest in the field of sexuality originated in population and demographic studies, and was associated with the negative impacts of population growth (Corrêa and Parker 2004). This also equated sexuality with heteronormativity, casting other sexual practices as deviant and requiring containment. Furthermore, as Corrêa et al (2008) point out, the research approaches typically used within population studies are large-scale, national-level surveys, which are spectacularly insensitive to differences in sexual practices across highly diverse contexts. They also inappropriately assume a modern nuclear family

structure. Such studies stand critiqued therefore for imposing western norms, in moral, conceptual and epistemological terms (Tamale 2011).

Nevertheless, a range of policies and priorities have come together which seem to hold fertile possibilities for more plural and situated understandings of youth sexualities. Our interest in these as discursive openings flows from a theoretical understanding of discourse as constitutive of our social realities, and integral to our construction as legible subjects. In other words, discursive frameworks render some ways of being and doing ‘speaking’, while others remain foreclosed, or ‘unspeakable’ (Butler 1997). We are interested therefore in the discourses through which sex and sexuality can be debated, and how these might disrupt the previously ‘unspeakable’.

The key discourses which we identify as potentially propitious for opening up new domains of ‘speaking’ in relation to youth sexuality include (1) the development of international human rights legislation with its strengthening commitments to women’s rights and to the elimination of violence against women; (2) the emergence of the concept of sexual citizenship; (3) alternative theorisations of gender and sexuality by African feminists, postcolonial and post-structural writers who all challenge the normative binaries of Western liberal thought; and (4) international and national policy interest in youth citizenship and youth participation. We explore the promises and potential ambiguities of each of these discourses in turn below. After a brief depiction of the Senegalese context, we then review the research methodology and research methods, before presenting our data analysis of the discourses youth themselves deployed in relation to sex and sexuality. The concluding reflections then revisit the four key discourses we have just identified, interrogating the extent that they have reframed youth sexualities in this context.

Reframing youth sexualities: shifting discourses, new possibilities?

The notion of human rights was of course integral to the emergence of modern democracies. However general revulsion against the horrors of World War II saw the creation of the United Nations in 1945, quickly followed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. This then inaugurated what is now an extensive panoply of international human rights treaties and conventions, backed by an increasing number of multilateral institutions.

This focus on rights seems propitious, but was founded on modern, liberal understandings of the subject. Historically this assumed the separation of public and private spheres and installed a masculinist, heteronormative understanding of society and social relations. Nevertheless, after considerable activism both in the Global North and South, gender equality has gained general recognition in international policy circles as a cross-cutting issue (UN 1979; Cairo 1994; Beijing 1995) so that gender is now mainstreamed in contemporary international policy agendas. To give one recent example, gender equality is foregrounded in the preamble to the Sustainable Development Goals (UNESCO 2015), and Goal 5 is devoted exclusively to gender equality, with universal access to education and to SRH rights as specific targets.

Turning secondly to the concept of ‘sexual citizenship’, Corrêa et al (2008) trace the struggle to incorporate more affirmative discourses of sexual pleasure and satisfaction in key multilateral policy fora, highlighting the resistance in UN forums to the language of ‘sexual rights’ or ‘sexual orientation’. UN Special Rapporteur Paul Hunt is identified as having disrupted liberal understandings of rights in UN circles by declaring that ‘sexuality is characteristic of all human beings [...] a fundamental aspect of an individual’s identity’ and therefore that ‘sexual rights are human rights’ (2004, 15). This echoes feminist and gay rights activists’ reconceptualization of citizenship (e.g. Richardson 1998; Weeks 1998) and

cleaves an opening in international human rights texts for more fluid understandings of sex and sexuality that recognise these as integral to citizenship.

We note here that in development contexts, major multilateral organisations and many NGOs and INGOs have taken up global discourses of human rights, so that development issues have become framed as questions of human rights. Nevertheless, the extent that this work might embrace these more open understandings of citizenship seems particularly dubious in education contexts. Western constructs of the child associate this with ‘innocence’ and construe sexuality as an adult domain from which children should be protected (Robinson 2012). Youth as a category holds quite different connotations, being associated with risk, sexual arousal, and sexual deviance (France 2005). Unsurprisingly perhaps, rights-based approaches to education seem ambivalent about adopting a more open framing of citizenship and sexuality. For instance, while UNESCO (2009) explicitly uses terms such as sexuality(ies) and sexual orientations, UNESCO and UNICEF (2007) does not, and uses the word ‘sexual’ to refer to negative rights only, such as a child’s rights to protection from sexual abuse or exploitation. UN (1995) similarly focuses on youth’s protection against sexual abuse or slavery, and sexually-transmitted diseases.

So while some international and national discourses suggest more openness to different forms of sexual expression, how this plays out in relation to different groups, and in different contexts requires close attention. Moreover, claims to ‘openness’ are bound up with wider geo-political positioning. For example, the supposed tolerance of liberal democracies to sexual difference can be instrumentalised by Western powers in ways that work against particular immigrant groups (Butler 2008). Sabsay (2013) also identifies how gay rights

advocacy has been taken up by Western leaders in their engagement with countries in the Global South in ways that project the superiority of their more 'progressive' values.

Sabsay (2013) suggests this perpetuates 'orientalist' constructions of sexuality, which were intrinsic to the development of the 'sexual sciences' at the end of the 19th Century. These projected normative frameworks for sexual behaviours, and simultaneously delineated sexual pathologies or 'perversions' (Foucault 1998). While couched in the authoritative language of science, their normative typologies were infused with Western religious morals. Tamale (2001) critiques the studies of African sexualities conducted in the 19th century by colonial explorers and missionaries, suggesting these were informed by an imperialist sense of superiority which 'orientalised' African sexualities in ethnocentric and racist ways. African sexualities were represented as a constitutive 'other' of Victorian (largely protestant) sexual ideals. They were equated with 'primitiveness', and judged to be 'immoral, bestial and lascivious' (p.15). Tamale (2011) also points to the ways such judgements fell particularly on women's sexualities, given that Christianity and Islam associated women's bodies with 'impurity and inherent sin' (p.16).

Tamale (2011) alerts us to the colonial framing of understandings of gender and sexuality, the critique of which leads us to our third discursive reframing of gender and sexuality. We refer here to the writings of African and black feminists and more widely postcolonial and poststructural theorists who have spoken back to the supposed universalisms of Women in Development (WID) and Gender and Development (GAD) frameworks (Chilisa and Ntseane 2010). As Oyěwùmí (1997) argues, the category 'woman' was not used within Yoruba culture in Nigeria until colonial times, when it introduced a dualistic 'bio-logic' through which gendered subjectivities in African contexts came to be understood. Arnfred (2006:12)

also critiques GAD for carrying over ‘colonial/missionary images and imaginations of ‘African culture’’. In many policy contexts, binary understandings of ‘sex’ were retained, in ways that obstructed recognition of the fluidities and multiplicities of sexual identities and the extent to which these are dynamic, social and cultural productions. Both WID and GAD approaches thus stand accused by postcolonial writers of re-inscribing North-South hierarchies and positioning women in the South as victims of oppressive traditions from which they need to be liberated (Spivak 1988).

Overall, a major critique of WID and GAD approaches is their scant engagement with theories of gender and sexuality (Humphreys et al 2008). Minimal attention is paid to the implications of theorising gender as a ‘social construction’ – this might be cited in a tokenistic way, but most studies do not take up the challenge of attending to the ways gender might be differently constructed, in ways that go beyond a biological or medical vision of sex, which is normatively bounded within a gender polarity. Few WID and GAD studies consider sexuality and gender through theories of discourse and of discursive practices, which attend to the ways gender is ‘done’ within different gender regimes. Engaging in this way does take social construction seriously. It allows us to open up the practices that stabilise and reify gender positioning, making gender seem a natural, taken-for-granted fact of life (Foucault 2000). A focus on the discursive practices through which gender and more generally our subjectivities are constituted takes up an understanding of gender as ‘performative’:

that is constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed.

(Butler 2006:34)

Butler's theorisation is also especially useful for allowing an analysis of the regulation of particular gender performances and the sedimentation of gender norms. She points how these typically involved an 'epistemic regime of presumptive heterosexuality' (2006:xxx). An understanding of gender as performative recognises the historical contingencies of gender regimes and allows attention to the particularities of how gender (and sexuality) is 'done' in different contexts, and what gendered subjectivities a particular regime might privilege, or disqualify. It is also worth pointing out that although Butler's performative theory of gender draws on speech act theory, speech acts are always bodily acts, enacted in the material world, and with material effects.

Our fourth potentially productive opening for the resignification of youth sexuality is the interest in international development in youth participation as active citizens, as indeed reflected in the conceptualisation of this research project. Interest in youth participation is also propelled by policy-makers awareness that around 87 % of world's youth live in the Global South (World Economic Forum 2013). Many are out of work, and many live in Muslim-majority countries, all of which adds to fears about youth alienation and radicalisation. Overall, the precarious situation of youth in the world creates a strong rationale for ensuring youth's participation as rights holders and as citizens. As Dunne et al (2014) report, interest in youth participation is evident on the part of NGOs, INGOs, and multilateral organisations from UNESCO to the World Bank. Youth's participation in the conduct of research is also advocated, and indeed was requested by the funders in this project (Dunne et al 2015 focuses on the project's participatory methodologies).

A further axis we identify as potentially important, although more ambiguously, stems from reactions to the HIV/AIDS pandemic which unfolded during the 1980s and was particularly acute in many Global South countries. This led to a considerable increase in the research and development work targeting sexuality in afflicted areas. However, while social

constructionist approaches to researching gender and sexuality had fostered new vocabularies, Corrêa et al (2008:129) suggest international responses to the health pandemic produced ‘a rapid re-medicalisation of approaches to sexuality’. This may be too sweeping; alongside epidemiological studies, the response to the pandemic also supported research into youth identities (e.g. Bhana and Pattman 2009) and the diversities of sexual expressions across different African contexts (e.g. Sandfort et al 2013). HIV/AIDS prevention efforts have nevertheless been critiqued for reproducing the victim discourses found in WID/GAD approaches (Arnfred 2006), or older colonial stereotypes of African sexuality as ‘insatiable, alien and deviant’ (Tamale 2011:17). The lens on sexuality became re-centred on penetrative sex, and its associated health risks. Some countries e.g. Benin, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Niger, Sierra Leone and Togo, also criminalized ‘risky’ sexual practices, reversing the trend towards greater tolerance of non-heterosexual relations (Tamale 2011).

Overall therefore, these different intersecting discourses would seem to offer possibilities for a reframing of youth sexualities that may resist the normative constructions historically informing the field of international development. At the same time, the international response to the HIV-AIDS epidemic re-inserted a medical lens in many contexts (Corrêa et al 2008). Research in African contexts also suggests how discussions of sexuality can be laden with religious and moral recriminations (Arnfred 2006; Dunne 2008; Tamale 2011). This makes it important to explore the discourses that youth deploy themselves in constructing and representing their sexuality, which we take up by focusing on the Senegalese case.

The Senegalese Context

Senegal is located in the north west of Sub Saharan Africa and gained its independence from France in 1960. Its official language remains French, although Wolof is the majority language. CIA (2013) classified it as a lower middle income country with a population of 13.73 million and a GDP of \$14.16 billion. Around 46.7% of Senegal’s population were

below the national poverty line (rising to 57.1% in rural contexts). It is a Muslim-majority country, with approximately 94% of the population being Muslim, and around 5% Christian. Its population is young; the median age is 18, and 63% are under 25. In 2012, Senegal was ranked 90th out of 135 countries for gender equality (WEC 2014). With respect to sexual and reproductive health, WEC (2014) report a fertility rate of 5 births per woman, and that 30% of those aged 15-19 were married. Use of contraception by married women is reported as only 13%. HIV/AIDS prevalence is low compared to other African contexts, being less than 1% overall in 2007. However USAID (2010) identifies much higher infection rates amongst female sex workers in Dakar (8%) and Ziguinchor, (29%), a coastal town in the south, close to gold mining areas, and amongst men who have sex with men (21.5% in Dakar). Senegal has tried to develop 'Family Life Education' within its national education curriculum but conservative sociocultural norms have hampered its implementation (Chau et al 2016).

Research Methodology and Methods

The research was part of a wider study funded by an international NGO which explored interventions to support youth as active citizens in three contexts, Occupied Palestinian Territories, Pakistan and Senegal (Dunne et al 2014). The research adopted a case study approach. After a review of related literature, fieldwork visits were made to the case study contexts, each lasting approximately two weeks. Here we focus on the Senegalese case. Fieldwork was conducted in October 2012 and included both urban and rural locations. This involved research visits in Dakar (the capital), its suburbs, and Tambacounda and Kédougou in the south, close to Gambia. The case study methods included documentary analysis, ongoing observations recorded in a fieldwork diary, semi-structured interviews with community leaders and directors of NGOs (n=13) involved in projects which related to youth rights, and twelve (mostly single-sex) focus groups with male and female youth (n=71) who

had been involved in these projects. For some, this involvement included being trained as SRH peer educators.

The research instruments such as interview schedules and project information sheets were developed in English by the university research team before fieldwork commenced and then translated into French by the lead researcher for the Senegal case. Ethical approval was secured from the University ethics panel and taken forward with local participants.

Permission to record and transcribe the interviews was requested. From the recordings, each researcher extracted key sections which they translated and transcribed. Excerpts from these are used to illustrate the analysis below. The acronyms of FFG and MFG indicate female and male focus groups respectively.

The INGO requested that youth were active in the conduct of the research as a further way of privileging youth perspectives. In each context they recruited ‘youth researchers’ (YRs) who worked alongside the lead researcher during the fieldwork phase. This signals the INGO’s embrace of the arguments for youth participation discussed above. However as Dunne et al (2015) discuss, youth’s participation as researchers cannot transcend power relations. These are shifting and contingent, productive of different voices in different spaces; we cannot assume youth ‘voice’ to be transparent and pellucid. Any assumptions of ‘transparency’ must be questioned for their modern understandings of the subject, i.e. as rational, autonomous agents who have sovereign control over what can be voiced. Instead, from a post-structural perspective we recognise that what is and can be ‘voiced’ depends on wider discursive frameworks which are constitutive of that voice, and which continually frame our coming into being as subjects. Drawing on Butler (1997), our approach to the analysis therefore attends closely to the contingencies of the discourses that are speakable or unspeakable in different contexts, with special reference to sex, gender and sexuality.

The YRs, one male and one female, were recruited because of their previous involvement in relevant INGO programmes, one related to citizenship and another to SRH (where they were peer educators), and because of their language skills. They were higher education students studying in Dakar, and were aged 22. They accompanied the lead researcher to all fieldwork locations. The YRs were offered a one-day induction with the lead researcher in each context, although in Senegal, this became half a day, because of YRs' examination commitments. This induction attempted to cover the focus of the research, a review of the research methods and the instruments to be used, and ethical aspects such as securing informed consent and maintaining confidentiality. Given the complexities of informed consent in relation to sensitive SRH issues (Leach 2006), we explicitly sought the YR's advice about using the term 'sexual' on the project information sheet through which participants' consent was secured. However, the YRs declared that the term was acceptable.

In addition to advising on local sensitivities, the YRs participated in individual interviews in conjunction with the lead researcher, conducted youth focus groups, sometimes with the lead researcher, but sometimes alone, and provided translation and interpretation where needed, e.g. from French to Wolof, the language of most Senegalese. They also kept a research diary and reflected on the research in an exit interview.

The analysis of the research data is informed by post-structural theoretical perspectives which recognises the constitutive and normative force of discourse in the production of our subjectivities. Rather than the sovereign subject of liberal humanism, this recognises how language frames and makes possible different subject positions, normalising particular (gendered) ways of being and disqualifying others:

it is by being interpellated with the terms of language that a certain social existence of the body first becomes possible... the address constitutes a being within the possible circuit of recognition and, accordingly, outside of it in abjection. (Butler 1997:5)

Our emergence as an acting/speaking subject depends therefore on these *prior* discursive circuits of recognition, through whose names and categories we are interpellated, or summonsed into being. Importantly however, what is ‘speakable’ in any particular circuit of recognition is constituted through what is ‘unspeakable’. As Butler (1997, p.135) puts it, this ‘unspeakability’ is ‘the condition of subject formation’. We argue that this understanding of discourse and the production of the subject is particularly relevant for a discussion of the discourses of ‘sexual’ and reproductive health that Senegalese youth deployed themselves. It is to this that we now turn.

Speaking gender and sexuality – youth as ‘sexually active’ in the closet

Overall, the speaking of sex and sexuality by the Senegalese youth participants was severely constrained, often taboo, unless circumscribed by heteronormative marital relations. Sexual activity outside marriage was tainted with impropriety and immorality. Even in peer-to-peer discussions, sexual activity could be denied, and where recognised, was often negatively constructed. There were strong taboos about speaking about sexual relations inter-generationally, within religious circles, and wider political contexts. In broad terms, sex and sexuality were largely unspeakable, in ways that consolidated a heteronormative, masculinist gender regime. Youth are often constructed as agents of change within contemporary discourses on youth citizenship, although a post-structural theorisation requires us to consider the ways youth agency must always work within and through wider social norms. We now

explore the discourses through which youth talked about sex and sexuality, before focusing more closely on how discourses of the family and of religion were critical to the maintenance of this gender regime. Finally, in our concluding section, we consider the extent to which the more fertile possibilities of contemporary international discourses had been taken up in youth discourses of sex and sexuality.

Across the interviews, there was frequent reference to youth being '*sexually active*', which generally seemed to imply heteronormative, penetrative sexual relations, as the consequence could be unwanted pregnancies, or sexually-transmitted diseases. However, sex as a topic was generally 'unspeakable': '*The most taboo topic today, it's sexuality*' (FFG). Youth (particularly female youth) were described as feeling compelled to deny they were having sexual relations, sometimes even when speaking amongst peers:

On the whole in Senegal, the problem is that we live out our sexuality, but no one wants to talk about it. As soon as the topic of sexuality is broached, they go off in a corner saying no, I don't do this, I'm a virgin, I've been abstentious, I haven't had sexual relations, although they are .. that's the problem. (FFG)

Moral propriety was central to youth discourses about sex. These were also permeated by negativity – e.g. related to a girl's right to say no, or (more occasionally) the importance of the male showing self-restraint. Very few youth discussions reflected any positive aspects of sex, for example as something that could be pleasurable. Even a male youth activist and blogger who described sexuality as '*something that was regal*' reportedly asked the female YR if she '*accepted or denied*' her sexuality, as if this was something an individual could assume, or decline to assume. This way of speaking about sex is quite remote therefore from an understanding of human beings as necessarily sexual beings, where citizenship and

sexuality are recognised as co-implicated and mutually constitutive (Richardson 1998; Weeks 1998).

The female YR response below asserts her ‘non-refusal’. It further suggests how presumptive heterosexuality was infused with biological determinisms and associated with undesirable consequences:

.. he asked me I said yes or no to sexuality.. I said I did not say no to sexuality, because if I did that, it would be a paradox. Obviously at the age of puberty, a young girl begins to be attracted to boys, she starts to change, to be interested in this. So I say yes to my sexuality, and I would also say to youth, make sure you take precautions so that you don’t end up with an unwanted pregnancy. (FFG)

With respect to the notion of ‘sexual citizenship’, it became clear that the conjuncture of citizenship and sexuality had not been directly supported by education programmes in this context. For example, when reviewing the aims of the research at the beginning of one interview, one NGO director could not identify a programme that brought them together:

.... in my opinion, there has been no programme which articulates together in a clear and precise way children’s citizenship, education, and sexual and reproductive health. [...] It would be very interesting to work on these three axes together. (Male NGO director).

Indeed at times it seemed as if youth separated their exercise of citizenship from sexuality. Instead, youth’s articulation of their Senegalese citizenship seemed strongly associated with formal electoral processes and their appropriate conduct (Crossouard and Dunne 2015). Although the language of rights was deployed, the exercise of girls’ SRH health rights in particular was mostly constructed in highly medicalised and generally defensive way. It did

not reflect any of the more positive constructions discussed above. For example, when female youth were asked about their SRH rights, discourses of health rather than sexuality prevailed, alongside the right to rebuff unwanted sexual approaches:

We need also to talk about AIDS, to make youth aware of their sexual and reproductive health rights. Youth are more active now – 13% of women have had sexual relations before the age of 15, but this can cause problems, such as cancer of the uterus. (FFG)

... we have the right to go for health consultations, to have medical treatment, see a gynaecologist... and also the right to go to college, without fear of rape, or sexual abuse. Your body belongs to you, if someone touches you in a way that you dislike, you have the right to express your displeasure, and to say that this is not something I like. (FFG)

Given the prevalence of gender violence in schools in the developing world (Dunne et al 2006), it is understandable that such rights were important to these female youth. In contrast, the male YR during the initial researcher induction queried whether questions about rights would have any meaning for respondents, and whether it was worth asking about them in the interviews. Female youth reported that it was not always possible to exercise these rights, because of their lack of security in the home and in the community, which left them exposed to serious risks such as rape. This group of female youth were relatively elite, having completed secondary education and participated as peer educators in NGO programmes. The situation of more marginalised females seems likely to be additionally compromised (see Oduro, 2012). The burden of managing health risks seemed also to be apportioned predominantly to girls/female youth – the importance of including boys in sex education was raised much less frequently.

It will already be apparent that youth's predominant understandings of sexuality, as well as those of adult respondents, assumed a male/female heterosexual matrix. There were countless examples of this across all groups of respondents. Only in one conversation with a male adult NGO director were rights to sexual health discussed in ways that included alternative sexualities.

The right to sexual health – [...] we should recognise these rights. We cannot avoid this debate. We do not have the right to persecute someone, simply because they have a different sexuality for example. (Male NGO director)

We continued our discussion by engaging with the case of a male journalist who was in custody in Senegal, accused of having sexual relations with a man, depicted in local media as 'bestial acts'. The legal system in Senegal does not use the term 'homosexuality', but males having sex with males are seen as 'acts against nature' and are a criminal offence. This NGO director stressed that traditionally, Senegal was a country of tolerance, and that '*we need to go in that direction*'. At the same time, when youth were asked about this ongoing case, they declared that homosexuality was against their religion, and one male youth added the person now in jail would be killed (the journalist was later convicted and imprisoned). The high HIV/AIDs rates for men who have sex with men (USAID 2008) are suggestive of a further silence in what was speakable by youth in relation to non-heteronormative sexual practices.

The only other youth discussion of non-heterosexual relations was also negative, concerning sexual exploitation of the *talibés*, these being young boys whose care is given over to Koranic schools or *daara*. This care is premised on them seeking alms on a daily basis. When their situation was raised by a respondent as an important rights issue in Senegal, the female YR explained that they were expected to bring back 500 francs a day to the *daara*, and if they did

not, they could be beaten. This left them vulnerable to child sex abuse as child prostitution was one way of them earning this money.

Alongside the privileging of heteronormative understandings of sexuality, it will also be apparent from the above that gender was understood by respondents in terms of a male/female binary. By narrowing gender to a concern for girls, this reconstitutes the male as the norm, with the female as its constitutive other. In one example of this, when identifying major problems in Senegalese society, one male INGO director immediately identified '*the question of girls, the question of gender*', equating the two, and going on to argue for girls to be included more often in debates about sexual relations. This binary understanding makes it more difficult to trouble the dominant heteronormative understandings of male/female relations, which saw the rightful place of females as in the home. We revisit this below, in our discussions of the power of the family.

In contrast to a performative understanding of gender (Butler 2006), psychological notions such as self-esteem were used to explain female youth's subordination, as in this example:

I don't stigmatise them.. we did a programme with young girls on their self-esteem, and where that self-esteem comes from. Do you really have that self-esteem in you? [..] We have the power to convince, to take them where we want.. they have a problem all the time though about standing up for themselves, although we want them to do that, we want them to be in positions of authority, to be leaders. (Male youth activist).

This individualised framing constructs women in a deficit mode and as the origin of their problems, without acknowledging the sociocultural norms that frame their agency, in which men are also complicit.

In conclusion, the ways that sex and sexuality was 'speakable' reproduced and normalised a heteronormative gender regime which assumed a male/female binary that continued to be dominated by male privilege and in ways that constructed women as the origin of their subordinated positioning.

Sustaining this Regime

We turn now to two key sets of discourses through which this heteronormative and masculinist gender regime was sustained, which we identify as firstly as those related to the institution of the family, and secondly of religion, each of which are discussed below.

The Power of the Family

Although youth could be constructed as agents of change, as '*the key to bringing change in society*' in the words of an NGO director, the power of family relations and of adults more generally was recognised by youth and adults as important in the Senegalese context. As one male education NGO director put it:

Everything that a youth does, he (sic) does in society, and with society. He does it with his family. And so his first duty, his first responsibility, is to make sure that his family understands him. He must not become excluded from his family or society. He must make sure that his family understands him, and it is through this that he will assimilate social values into his life. Because we do not want values that are outside family values. We do not want values that are outside of our social norms.

Respect for the family was bound up for this male educationalist with respect and assimilation of wider social norms. These are presented as imperatives that are not open to question. Although youth are stereotypically constructed as resistant to authority, youth respondents' respect for the authority of the family was often evident:

As youth, we are supported by our family, before we do anything, it is first our parents who give us and who lead us on a good path. It is them who decide what becomes of us, we follow the orders of our parents. It is like that, the power of parents is really respected, it has a lot of force. (MFG)

The power of elders in general influenced what could be aired in public and by whom. As a senior NGO figure reflected:

We are in a society where many topics are taboo, which have been ‘taken hostage’ by adults, and where youth would like to participate, but don’t have the opportunity.

(Male NGO Director)

These hierarchical age relations were conjoined within a gender regime where male and female youth were differentially positioned in relation to family reproduction. Gender equality legislation has been passed in Senegal. However at different points in the research, male youth contested the possibility of gender parity. For instance, in this interaction, an INGO director along with a male and female colleague was asked about the most pressing issues for youth in Senegal:

Male INGO Director: The first thing is employment, for youth to have paid employment, not employment that is unpaid, voluntary work. And that’s important for students too [...]

Male colleague: Although she’ll get married [referring to the female YR], it’s not a problem, it’s the man who will be responsible.

[explosion of angry protest from female colleague and female YR]

Female YR: No! I’m not at university now just to end up like that. I’m going to be independent, I have the right to a good education, at university and not just school, and to a good job afterwards, with a good salary!

Male YR: So you'll be an equal partner (*faire le 50/50*), come on, you can't do that.

Another male adult respondent who spoke of the power of the family and how this restricted youth's autonomy also noted that young girls were '*particularly affected*', as control of young girls was much stronger than for boys, and that '*young girls did not have the right to a public life*'.

The weight of family norms and age relations were significant in relation to sexuality, mostly as an absence, or if as a presence, as a heavily moralised issue. As several respondents identified, discussion of sexuality was taboo in the family:

Our parents/relations do not talk to us about sexuality, because in Senegal, propriety is so important. All topics are taboo – if you approach your father or mother about sexuality, you are told that you lack respect, which is not true. (FFG)

Similarly, a male youth activist who gave SRH information via text messaging commented:

Youth have a real need for support on SRH issues, but they're not getting help from the organisations they can go to, or their families. So for example when a young girl sends me a text message to say she's had sexual relations with her boyfriend for the first time and that it's now a long time since she had her period, I say to her, you need to come to ASBEF [a health care provider], and do a pregnancy test, she texts me back to say, ok, but don't call me, because my mum is just beside me. She's scared of talking to her mum.

Youth working as peer educators in HIV/AIDS education programmes also faced family communication barriers. A girl youth who had participated in many SRH workshops and conferences over the last six years, including conferences outside Senegal, could not admit

this to her mother, or talk about sexual and reproductive health at home. Another reported that her mother had wanted her to stop participating as a peer educator on SRH issues.

Girls in particular spoke of the shame attached to sexual health problems, so for example they were too ashamed to ask their mothers about sexual health problems such as a genital rash or vaginal discharge. However if they were seen going to a family planning clinic, the inference was made that you were having sexual relations, so that '*you are said to be not a good girl, not a good person*' (FFG). Sexual relations were acceptable only within marriage, which in practice debarred unmarried youth from sexual and reproductive health services:

Youth refuse to go to the youth health centre – if I go there, my name will be nothing, I will have a very bad reputation. If you get pregnant, or have an abortion, you are really looked down on. [...] In our society, it's very difficult, you can't talk unless you are married. The centre was for youth, but it's also attended by mothers, so that if you go there, they ask you, what are you doing there? (FFG)

The family was also identified as a source of sexual violence and abuse by two women school inspectors working in a poor suburb of Dakar. In a further indication of what was speakable, or rather unspeakable in this context, they had to rebuff the male YR's protests during the interview about such abuse being possible. Although the female YR remained silent during the interview, when contacted later, she agreed with the accounts of the female education officials, but added that such situations would often be covered up, or be turned against the girl:

Girls experience enormous problems linked to sexual violence outside of school, in their neighbourhoods, and sometimes even within their own family. And in most cases, they have no recourse to justice because the issue just goes nowhere. The girl lives out her situation in secret, she has no psychological support, or support from the

family – because when the affair becomes public, it's sorted out amicably, between relations, because it's the family. Indeed the young girl is often accused of being responsible, because she is shameless and immoral. (Female YR)

Marriage was reportedly used to cover up 'improper' sexual behaviours between males and female youth, so marriage would be arranged if a young woman became pregnant, to protect the family from dishonour and stigmatisation. Early marriage was also described as a consequence of prostitution involving young girls in the gold mining town of Kédougou in the south of Senegal. The vulnerabilities of such youth could not be further explored in this project and clearly require further research.

In conclusion, the institution of the family worked to regulate youth's sexual activities and sexualities by imposing a regime of silence on anything that compromised its propriety and moral integrity. Both male and female elders were complicit in this, as were youth themselves. In a society where elders were highly respected, castigation and opprobrium fell particularly heavily on girl youth. Those that compromised family integrity were beyond the pale of recognition. Masculine hegemonies seemed impervious to critique, even in cases of male violence against female youth; dominant cultural constructions of women and their bodies as inherently sinful, inherently lascivious, produced a reversal of imputations of impropriety so that these fell on the female 'temptress'.

The Weight of Religion

The influence of Muslim religious leaders on what was speakable/unspeakable about sexuality was powerful, at both a local and a national level. Imams were a '*main reference point*' within local communities, but meant that the '*weight of religion*' could constrain open debate on SRH in national politics:

Sexual and reproductive health isn't discussed in political circles. The way we [in the INGO] talk about these things – it is difficult to imagine someone from the government, someone from the Ministry of Education, or Ministry of Health, making the same arguments. [...] For those who are in power in the country, and for the Ministry of Health, the weight of religion is there. (SRH INGO)

As our earlier review of international policy texts hinted, this respondent found it much more acceptable to propose reforms related to the education of children, rather than address more contentious issues such as youth SRH or birth control, let alone sexual identities beyond the heteronormative.

Because of their influence, religious leaders were nevertheless sought out by NGOs who were involved in sexual and reproductive health programmes at a community level. This was only possible with some Imams however. For example, a male youth activist reported having approached an Imam with the '*simple suggestion*' that he address child sexuality in his Friday prayers; The Imam had responded that '*he could not do this, he would never do it*'. In the same vein, a female youth SRH educator reported that an Imam had accused their organisation of encouraging youth promiscuity, by giving contraception advice and distributing condoms.

Nevertheless, some Imams were more open. We interviewed an Imam in a poor suburb of Dakar who talked about addressing SRH issues in his Friday prayers. The terminology used was important however. At the opening of this interview, when the lead researcher reviewed the purposes of the research, using the term '*sexual and reproductive health*', the male YR leapt in, to apologise for her '*vulgarity*'. Later, when another local youth who accompanied us on this visit asked if religion (Islam) was against 'sexual health rights', the Imam's response declined any use of the word 'sexual':

For health? For reproduction? Islam does not forbid this. Knowledge is a god-given right, it is the right of all people. Islam accepts modern medicine, when it helps moral and physical health. (Imam)

The term 'sexual' seemed to be resisted, potentially offensive, unspeakable. In Wolof, the term 'sex' was also reported to be a '*dirty word*'. The language which the Imam's message took up was instead that of the family, and its health, which he also linked to the health of the nation, as part of '*being a good Muslim*'. We also discussed contraception, which this Imam found acceptable and important, particularly to avoid pregnancies that came too close together, these being a risk to the health of the mother and of the child. However contraception was acceptable only when it involved traditional methods such as '*coitus interruptus*' (i.e. male withdrawal before ejaculation).

Overall, the dominant concern in this interview was not sexuality, but reproductive health, where concerns for the health of the mother and child are instrumentally used to justify girls' education and bound up with wider concerns for society and the nation. Although the part of the male seems barely acknowledged, the discussion also assumes heteronormative married relations – there is no openness to the possibility of extra-marital sex. In other focus group discussions, youth reported this was forbidden within Islam. Just as family norms constrained youth subject positions, religious norms also seemed to impose rigid and non-negotiable fixities on the ways of being that were recognised in this context. Other possibilities remained in the realms of unspeakability and abjection.

Having demonstrated how discourses of morality and medicine constrained or indeed foreclosed more plural understandings of youth sexualities in this context, we return in our conclusion to the four discursive strands which had seemed propitious for supporting more diverse articulations of youth sexualities within international development contexts.

Reframing youth sexualities?

In our concluding section, we consider in turn the four international discourses identified earlier, exploring (1) how human rights and ‘rights-based’ approaches to development were supporting youth in their articulation of their sexualities; (2) the extent that notions such as sexual citizenship were allowing more plural articulations of sexuality and recognition of citizenship as intrinsically sexual; (3) if new understandings of gender and sexuality that transcend the binaries of liberal thought were proving useful in attending to the sociocultural specificities of youth’s sexual expressions; and (4) how generative the importance attached to youth’s active citizenship was proving.

Turning first to human rights discourses, it was striking that the male YR queried whether questions about rights would be meaningful for our respondents. However both focus group and observation data showed that the language of rights was being deployed, especially by females, although this was often in a defensive way, mainly referring to negative rights.

Positive articulations of SRH rights was typically limited to the right to SRH services. In the exercise of their rights, the data suggested that female youth in particular remained subject to gender-based violence (GBV). Furthermore, institutions like health care centres or the family, which one might expect to be a source of support were instead sites of moral judgements and indeed sites from which GBV could be perpetrated. Numerous instances during the fieldwork also illustrated that gender equality was paid lip service only, including by youth themselves. A discursive separation of public and private domains remained in place, in a gender regime which continued to reflect entrenched hegemonic masculinities.

Secondly, we discussed how acknowledgement of more plural forms of sexuality and sexual expression had gained a foothold in some international human rights texts. In recognising that citizenship was intrinsically sexual, these new discourses also transcended earlier connotations of sexuality with heterosexuality. However the data suggested that presumptive

heterosexuality prevailed in Senegal and that youth were intolerant of other forms of sexual expression. Although research into African sexualities (Arnfred 2006; Msibi 2013; Sandfort et al 2013; Tamale 2001) explores more plural expressions of sexuality beyond penetrative or heterosexual sex, including same-sex relations, being 'sexually active' was represented by youth participants as involving heterosexual, penetrative sex. Non-heterosexual relations were constructed as outside societal norms. Youth understandings of citizenship did not extend to more plural understandings of sexual citizenship. Neither did their discussions of citizenship link to sexual identities. They rather assumed the masculine subject.

Thirdly, we looked with optimism towards contemporary theorisations of gender and sexuality which transcend male/female binaries and instead address the contingent performances of masculinity and femininity within different gender regimes. These resist the imposition of western 'biologics' which informed much early research within population studies (Chilisa and Ntseane 2010; Humphreys et al 2008; Oyěwùmí 1997). However just as sexuality was equated with heterosexuality, gender was constructed predominantly through the lens of male and female sexes. Individualising psychological notions such as self-esteem were also deployed to understand what was construed as a lack of female agency. A biological determinism also coloured some youth discourses, conflating sex, gender and sexuality to provide a naturalized basis for an unassailable heteronormativity.

Finally, we viewed with optimism the current emphasis in international and national agendas on youth's active citizenship. However the research demonstrated how youth's agency always implicates power relations and how wider normative discourses inevitably frame their constructions of sexuality. Youth themselves recognised and reproduced their positioning as subordinates in society, including deferral to their family elders and respect of religious authorities. In relation to each other, youth discourses mostly perpetuated male dominance, reflecting an entrenched hegemonic masculinity. Although there were some challenges from

female youth, these were constrained by understandings of gender described in the previous point and the medicalised language of SRH.

Overall, SRH was the dominant lens available to youth to consider their sexuality. Its medicalized gaze foregrounded the risks and negative consequences that were associated with sexual activities. These pervasive negativities were compounded by moralising discourses that fell particularly heavily on female youth, who if sexually ‘active’ were constructed as immoral (and therefore unrecognisable as a subject). This moralising SRH lens was far from accommodating concepts such as sexual citizenship, and instead re-inscribed a binary gender lens. The prevailing gender regime assumed a heterosexual matrix, in which sex acts were legitimate only within marital relations and understandings of gender remained tied to the male/female binary. The institutions of family and of religion (in this instance Islam) emerged as the pillars of this gender regime. Together they conspired to make youth sexualities largely unspeakable, certainly across generations, and sometimes even amongst youth themselves. Female youth were particularly vulnerable in this regime, being held morally responsible for the consequences of sexual activities, even including those that were forced upon them. Although we have shown how they were actively contesting this regime, they often found themselves positioned as the abject others against which a heteronormative gender regime permeated by entrenched hegemonic masculinities was sustained.

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